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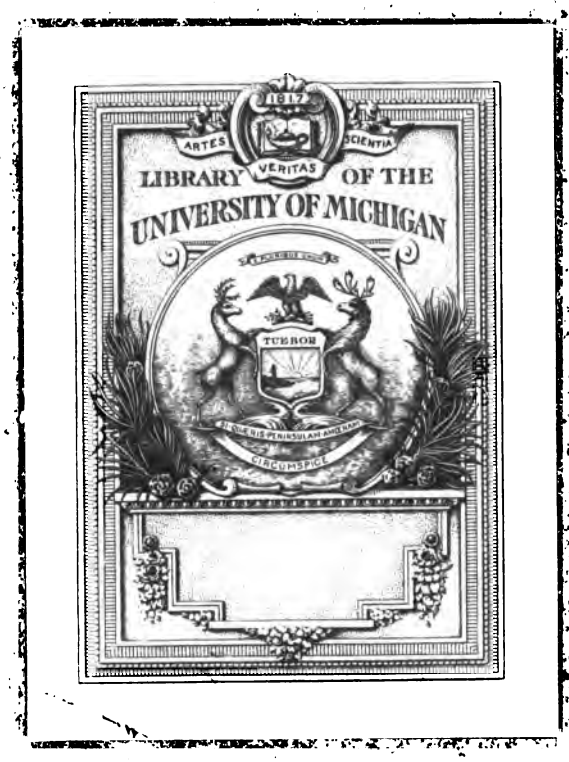
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UNIVERSITY STUDIES, NO. 6

12

THE NAMING OF COUNTIES IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

BY

CHARLES W. SMITH

ASSOCIATE LIBRARIAN

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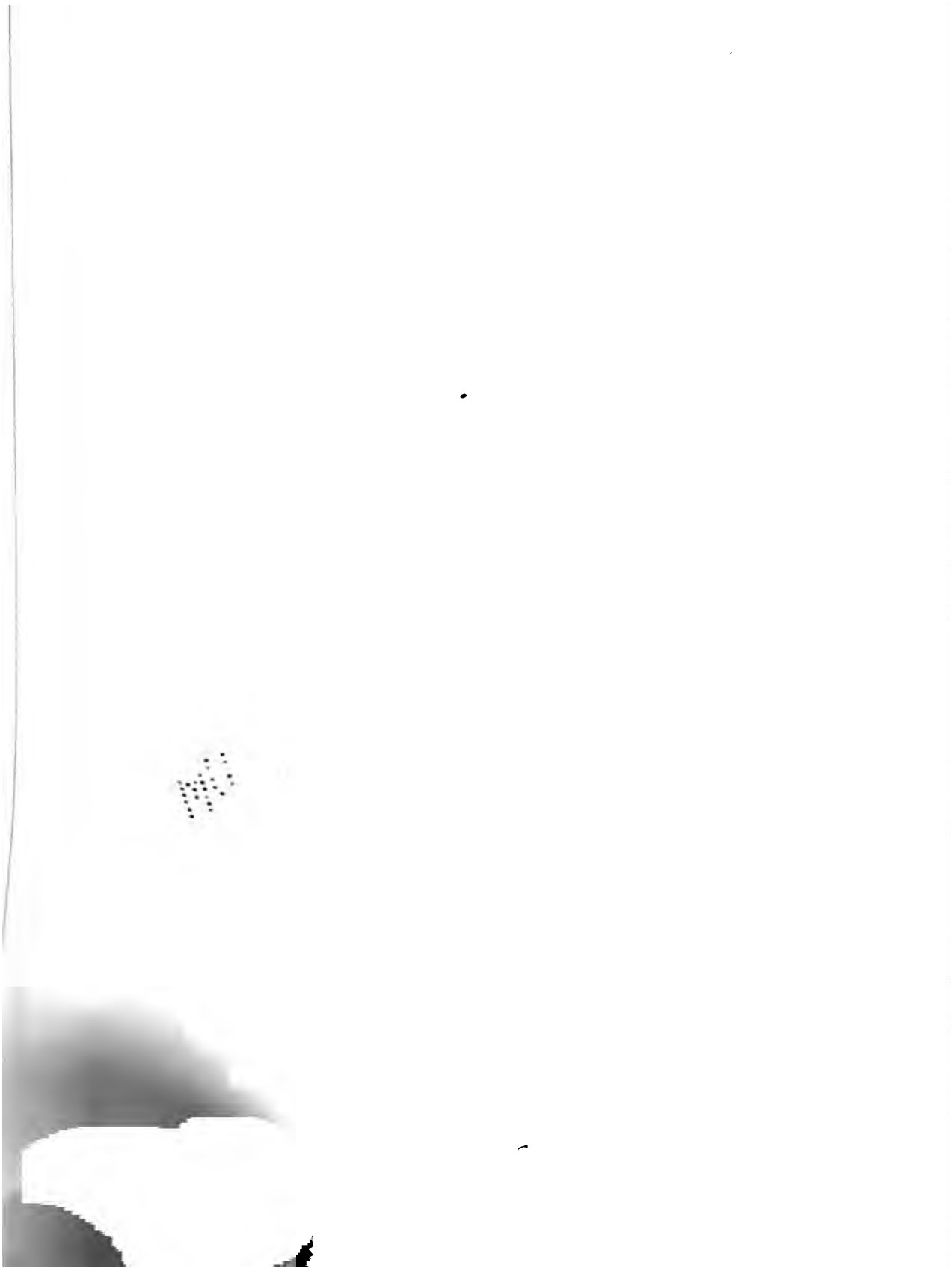

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THE NAMING OF COUNTIES IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

WITHIN the limits of the state of Washington, there are at present thirty-eight counties; of these, twenty-six were organized by territorial legislatures, eight were created before Washington attained to a separate territorial existence, and four have been added during the period of statehood. The purpose of the present study is to find out what names have been applied to these counties and how they came to be so named.

The naming of counties within the limits of the present state began under the Provisional Government of Oregon with an attempt to name two counties north of the Columbia River in honor of the explorers, Lewis and Clark. The bill for organizing these counties was introduced by Mr. McClure of the committee on districts[1] on the 12th of August, 1845. The bill passed the legislative assembly, but with a rider attached substituting the name Vancouver in place of Lewis and Clark, and defining one district instead of two counties.[2] In this form, it was approved on the 20th and provided that "All that portion of the Territory of Oregon lying north of the middle of the main channel of the Columbia River, shall be and the same is hereby declared a separate district under the name and style of Vancouver district.[3] At the next session of the assembly, attempt was made to eliminate the name Vancouver. On the 18th of December, 1845, Mr. Hill presented a petition praying that the name of Vancouver district be changed to that of Clark and that said district be divided.[4] Later in the day, he presented also two bills; the

[1] Grover. Oregon Archives, p. 101.
[2] Oregon Archives, p. 116.
[3] Brown. Political History of Oregon, v. 1, p. 174.
[4] Oregon Archives, p. 149.

one to change Vancouver district to that of Clark, the other providing for the creation of a Lewis county.[5] Immediate action was taken upon these bills with the result that upon the following day the bill creating Lewis county was passed, as was also a bill substituting in all cases the word "county" in place of the word "district"; but the bill to change the name of Vancouver district was indefinitely postponed.[6] There were now north of the Columbia River two counties named Lewis and Vancouver. The name Vancouver, however, did not grow in favor and on September 3, 1849, it was definitely enacted, "That the name of the county of Vancouver be and hereby is changed to Clark."[7]

The brief records of the legislative sessions of the Oregon Provisional Government do not indicate the meaning of this contest over county names. H. H. Bancroft, in noting the outcome of Mr. McClure's bill for establishing two counties, asserts that Mr. Applegate, the Speaker of the House, "had a prejudice in favor of the word 'district,'[8] but offers no explanation of the substitution of Vancouver in place of Lewis or Clark." Its real significance must be sought in the conflicting interests of the English and American settlers. The territory which was being organized was disputed territory, the English claims extending south to the Columbia River, while those of the United States extended north to at least the 49th parallel. It was only natural that the American element wished to see the names of Lewis and Clark established over this country which they had explored for the United States, while the English were just as desirous of associating with it the name of the explorer on whose work their claims were largely based. It was not until the treaty of June 15, 1846, that the claim of the United States was established north to the 49th parallel. Before this time the representatives of the interests of the United States were doubtless in a majority in the legislative assembly of the Oregon Provisional Government, but some of these members seem to have adopted for diplomatic reasons an assumed attitude of fairness to British interests which would account for the re-

[5] Oregon Archives, pp. 150, 151.
[6] Oregon Archives, pp. 151, 152.
[7] Abbott, T. O. *Real property statutes of Washington Territory* from 1843 to 1889, p. 69.
[8] Bancroft, H. H. History of Oregon, v. 1, p. 493.

tention of the name Vancouver until after the organization of Oregon as a territory of the United States.[9]

On February 4, 1851, a third county was created by cutting off the southwest corner of Lewis county.[10] It was named Pacific county on account of its ocean boundary, and is the only county in the United States bearing this name.

With but three counties organized and a population not greatly exceeding 1,000, the people of North Oregon began agitation for a separate territorial government. At a Fourth of July celebration in Olympia, 1851, Mr. John B. Chapman, the speaker of the day, gave expression to the popular feeling in a reference to "the future state of Columbia." So strong was the response that at an adjourned meeting a convention was called to meet at Cowlitz on the 25th of August, to consider the advisability of an appeal to Congress for a division of the Territory of Oregon. The Cowlitz Convention in addition to other business recommended the creation of four new counties. For two of them the names Simmons and Steilacoom were urged.[11]

At the next session of the Oregon legislature, one county only out of the recommended four was organized. A petition signed by fifty-six persons [12] praying for the establishment of a new county, to be known as Simmons, was presented by Mr. Anderson and a bill to this effect was about to be passed when Mr. M. T. Simmons, who was the man to be honored, protested[13] and the county was christened Thurston in honor of the first delegate to Congress from Oregon Territory.[14]

"Mike" Simmons, as he was familiarly called, was one of the first American settlers in the Puget Sound region. He was well known and generally liked, and although somewhat deficient in "book-learning"

[9] For discussion of this "assumed attitude of fairness," see Meany, E. S. *History of the State of Washington,* (N. Y. Macmillan, 1909), pp. 144-145.

[10] Abbott, p. 67 (see "*Journal and Local*" *Laws Or. Ter. Session*, 1850-51, p. 38).

[11] Thomas W. Prosch, in *The Political Beginning of Washington Territory* in Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society, v. 6, p. 152, June, 1905.

[12] Bancroft, H. H. History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, p. 51.

[13] Prosch, T. W. *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society,* v. 6, p. 152.

[14] Thurston County was created Jan. 12, 1852. See Abbott, p. 68.

et on February 28, 1854, the number was doubled by the creation of ght new counties.

Skamania was cut off from Clark county[20] and comprised all of astern Washington, including much of what is now Idaho and Montana. Eleven years later by act approved January 14, 1865, Skamania county, which by that time had been greatly reduced in size, was divided between Clark and Klickitat counties with provision that the Skamania county officers cease their functions on April 1, 1865. This act was disapproved by Congress in an amendment to the Organic Act on June 29, 1866,[21] and Skamania county reappeared on the scene. The attempt to divide Skamania county is explained by Mr. C. B. Bagley[22] as an effort to weaken the political power of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, which "held Skamania county in its vest pocket." "Its interference in politics," writes Mr. Bagley, "had aroused political antagonisms and it was designed to weaken or destroy its political power by dividing it between two large counties. However, the company showed itself equal to the emergency, by transferring the fight to Congress." The word Skamania is an Indian word said to mean "swift waters." It is said to have been applied by the Indians to the spot about two miles below the Cascades where in ascending the river they met the swift current of the Columbia.

Whatcom county was carved out of Island county in March, 1854.[23] "Whatcom was named in honor of a chief of the Nooksacks. His grave is a mile above Bellingham Bay coal mine."[24]

Sawamish county was carved from Thurston and named for a local tribe of Indians.[25] The name of this county was changed on January 8, 1864, to Mason county[26] in honor of Charles H. Mason, the first Sec-

[20] Laws of Washington, Session 1854, p. 473. Date not given.
[21] U. S. Congress, 39-1, Session Laws, 1865-66, p. 82.
[22] *Seattle Daily Times,* March 22, 1903, Magazine section, p. 6.
[23] Wash. Laws, 1854, p. 475. Date not given.
[24] Statement by Pearlita C. Stadelmann, of Bellingham. The writer is indebted to Mr. Thomas W. Prosch, of Seattle, for information warranting the belief that the town, lake and county were all named for the Indian Whatcom. He was friendly to the early pioneers.
[25] Wash. Laws, 1854, p. 474. Date not given.
[26] Wash. Laws, 1863-64, p. 71.

... Ison served with much ... time from March 26, 1... brilliant young man, hav... twenty and being only twen...

... was carved from Thur... county. The name is that ... means "sand," having ... of the river Chehalis.

... local Indian tribe and ... been ascertained.

... ...cum) gets its name ... is said to have been

... when the ... vast in extent ... as the land claim ... Walla Walla. Lewis ... peace. At the next ses... additional offices of county ... ever qualified, how... The name ... It is now ... and Cayuse word ... the word back to ... but the surmise is more

... p. 30.
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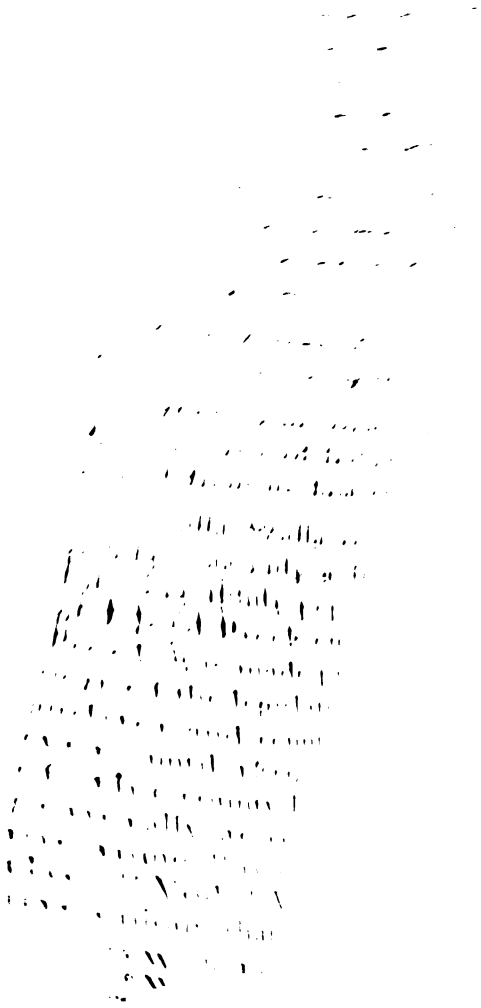
Clallam county, created also by the first territorial legislature,[34] was named for a local tribe of Indians. The word is said by the Clallam Indians to mean "strong," or "strong people," being a corruption of their name for themselves, "Nu-sklaim." The statement that the word is derived from the Makah "klo-lub" meaning "the clam people," is probably not correct.

In 1856, an attempt was made to create a Buchanan county, in honor, doubtless, of the President of the United States elected the month previous. A petition was presented to the house by Mr. Caples[35] in which certain citizens of Clarke county asked for a division of that county. This petition was accompanied by a bill for the creation of Buchanan county. The bill was advanced to a second reading after which it was indefinitely postponed.[36]

What is now Kitsap county was created as Slaughter county by act approved January 16, 1857.[37] It was named in honor of Lieutenant W. A. Slaughter, killed while defending from hostile Indians the lives of the American settlers in the Puget Sound region, December 4, 1855. However greatly admired and respected was the gallant Slaughter, his name was not the people's choice for the new county, as is shown by its legislative history. On January 9, 1857, Mr. T. D. Hinckley of King county presented to the house of representatives a petition of certain citizens of King county praying to be set off into a new county to be called the county of Madison.[38] On the same day, Mr. Henry C. Wilson of Jefferson and Clallam counties presented a petition of A. S. Miller and forty-five others of Jefferson county praying to be set off into a new county to be called the county of Madison.[39] In the hands of the committee on counties the name Kitsap was substituted for Madison.[40] On the 13th of January, the house inserted the name of Slaughter in place of Kitsap and the bill became a law.[41] Immediate protests, however,

[34] Wash. Laws, 1854, p. 472. Date not given.
[35] *Wash. House Journal,* 1856-57, p. 26.
[36] *Wash. House Journal,* 1856-57, p. 73.
[37] Wash. Laws, 1856-57, pp. 52-53.
[38] *Wash. House Journal,* 1856-57, p. 61.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 61.
[40] *Ibid.,* p. 74.
[41] *Ibid.,* pp. 77-78.



ty in order of creation was Spokane. This county
inct legal creations. First created on January 29,
ed officers failed to act. It received its second crea-
nuary 17, 1859, with the appointment of new officers
ies unchanged. On January 13, 1864, Spokane was
ns county and disappeared from the map. It remained
ns county until October 30, 1879, when it was re-
name is that of an Indian tribe said to mean "child of

county (pronounced Klik'-i-tat), created December 20,
named for a local tribe of Indians occupying the pass at the
These Indians were alert traders and are said to have levied
ighboring and passing tribes. Whatever may have been its
ificance, the word Klickitat came to mean "robber." Mr.
W. Hodge asserts that the word is the Chinookan "beyond,"
nce to the Cascades.[49]

omish county (pronounced Sno-ho-mish), created January 14,
was also named for an Indian tribe. The word is said to have
to a style of union in that tribe.

he counties of Missoula, Shoshone, Nez Percé, Idaho and Boisé
reated by Washington Territory in the early sixties, but are now
of Montana and Idaho.

Stevens county, created January 20, 1863,[51] was named in honor of
eral Isaac I. Stevens, first governor of the Territory, killed at the
le of Chantilly, September 1, 1862. Some interesting history is
nnected with the naming of this county. A bill was introduced in the
egislative Council on December 19, 1862, to create the county of
Awahna, which was twice read and referred to the committee on

[47] See Prosch, Thomas W. "Evolution of Spokane and Stevens County" in the *Quarterly* of the Oregon Historical Society, v. 5, pp. 25-33, March, 1904.
[48] Wash. Laws, 1859-60, Private Laws, pp. 420-21.
W. Handbook of American Indians, pt. 1, p. 713.
s, 1860-61, pp. 19-20.
s, 1862-63, Local Laws, p. 6.

vindication of Mr. Ferguson that his friends sought to associate his name with the county created during the session while the return to Yakima may indicate the work of Mr. Ferguson's enemies, or may else be attributed to the wishes of the residents of the county. The name Yakima comes from an Indian tribe of that name which is commonly reputed to mean "black bear," although some assert that the meaning is "coward"[57] and one writer states that it signifies "succotash garden, or, place where corn and beans are raised."[58] In general, very little dependence can be placed upon the meanings assigned to Indian names in this state.

Quillehuyte county was created January 29, 1868, but "there being not population enough to fill the county offices, the act was repealed the following year."[59] The territory reverted to Jefferson and Clallam counties from which it had been carved.

Whitman county was cut off from Stevens by act approved November 29, 1871, to take effect January 1, 1872.[60] It was named in honor of the missionary pioneer, Marcus Whitman.

San Juan county created by act approved October 31, 1873,[61] comprises the long-disputed islands of De Haro Archipelago. The name is a reminder of the Spanish discoveries on the Northwest Coast.

Columbia county was created by act approved November 11, 1875.[62] The first bill introduced in the legislature which met October 4, 1875, provided for the creation of a Ping county, to be cut from Walla Walla and named in honor of Councilman E. Ping, of that county. It passed both houses, but was disapproved by Governor Ferry on the ground that no legal provision had been made for representation in the legislature.[63]. Failing to pass over the Governor's veto, a new bill was

[57] Gannett, Henry. Origin of certain place names in the United States (U. S. Geol. Survey, Bull. No. 258), p. 332.

[58] Farquhar, Frank S. *Historical Sketches of Yakima County.* (See Washington Historian, v. 2, p. 191, July, 1901.)

[59] Bancroft, H. H. Washington, Idaho and Montana, p. 361.

[60] Wash. Laws, 1871, pp. 134-36.

Wash. Laws, 1873, p. 461.

Wash. Laws, 1875, pp. 133-35.

Wash. House Journal, 1875, pp. 21-22, 40-41, 110-112, 189-91, 203, 216.

Four days after the approval of the bill creating Lincoln county, an act was approved which set aside part of its territory into another county named in honor of Stephen A. Douglas.[71]

Franklin county was created by act approved November 28, 1883.[72] It was taken from Whitman county and named in honor of Benjamin Franklin.

On November 28, 1883, was approved also the act creating the county of Skagit (pronounced Skag'-it, soft "g") which was set off from Whatcom county.[73] A previous attempt had been made to create Skagit county by bill introduced in the legislature in 1873.[74] The name is that of an Indian tribe.

Okanogan county (pronounced O-ka-nog'-an) was created by act approved February 2, 1888.[75] It was made by dividing Stevens county, which at that time extended all the way from the Cascades to the Idaho boundary line, into two nearly equal parts and naming the eastern portion "Okanogan." The word is an Indian tribal name said to mean "rendezvous."

In 1889, Washington was admitted as a state, with express provisions in its constitution to restrict the formation of new counties. That no new county can now be organized unless there is an urgent demand for the same, is shown by the fact that but four ne wcounties have been added during the first twenty years of statehood. During this period at least nine attempts at forming counties have failed.

In 1891, bills were before the legislature for five new counties, none of which were passed. The names proposed were: Big Bend, Palouse,

gencer, a paper intimately concerned in the anti-railroad movement, does not hold this view. In a letter to the writer under date of May 15, 1909, he says: "There was no anti-railroad feeling in 1882, but a very strong one in 1884 and 1886. I do not suppose that feeling hostile to Gen. Sprague in 1882 or 1883 had anything to do with the naming of Lincoln County."

[71] Wash. Laws, 1883, p. 95.

[72] Wash. Laws, 1883, pp. 87-89.

[73] Wash. Laws, 1883, p. 97.

[74] *Wash. Council Journal,* 1873, p. 27.

[75] Wash. Laws, 1887-88, pp. 70-73.

Sherman, Washington and Ferry. In 1893, it was attempted to create a Wenatchee county. In 1899, the counties of Chelan and Ferry were created.

Ferry county[76] was set off from Stevens by amending and passing a bill to create "Eureka" county. The name was changed in order to honor Elisha P. Ferry, the first Governor of the State. The act was deemed peculiarly appropriate because Stevens county had been named for the first governor of the Territory.

Chelan county[77] (pronounced She-lan'), was the outcome of another attempt to create a Wenatchee county. The contest over a name for this county was the result of rival business interests. The name is that of the lake in the northern part of the county and is an Indian word said to mean "deep water."

In 1903, another attempt was made to create a Palouse county. Bills were also before the legislature to establish counties with the names of McKinley and Steptoe.

Benton county[78] was created by act approved March 8, 1905, drawing from Yakima and Klickitat for its territory. It was named in honor of U. S. Senator Thomas H. Benton, "Old Bullion," through the influence of Mr. E. L. Boardman, to whom the name was suggested by Mr. B. L. Grosscup, late corporation counsel for the Northern Pacific Railway Company.[79] At this session of the legislature a bill was indefinitely postponed which provided for the creation of the county of Coulee.

In 1907, a law was passed for the creation of Gray's Harbor county, but on November 7 of the same year the act was declared unconstitutional.[80]

Grant county, approved February 24, 1909,[81] completes the list to

[76] Wash. Laws, 1899, pp. 26-29.

[77] Wash. Laws, 1899, pp. 148-55.

[78] Wash. Laws, 1905, pp. 185-91.

[79] The writer is indebted to Mr. J. M. Hitt, Librarian of Washington State Library for investigating the facts in regard to the naming of Benton and Grant Counties.

[80] State ex. rel. Chehalis County v. Superior Court Pacific County, see Wash. Reports, v. 47, pp. 453-67.

[81] Wash. Laws, 1909, pp. 20-26.

date. It is to be set off from Douglas county. The name is in honor of General Grant and recalls an earlier attempt to associate his name with the counties of the state. In 1891, when a bill to create Big Bend county had been favorably reported to the house, a motion to change the name to "Grant" was lost by a vote of 17 yeas to 22 nays.[82]

As compared with many other states, Washington has been conservative in bestowing personal honors. Of the thirty-eight counties in the state, seventeen have personal names, seventeen have Indian names, while the remaining four are named for geographical features. While most of the personal names have been frequently used in other states, this state can at least boast that it has no Washington county! All of the Indian names are unique as are also Island, Pacific and Whitman. It is fortunate that so many of the counties have been named for the Indian tribes that have inhabited them, as such names carry with them a sense of locality not to be found in personal names.

CHARLES W. SMITH.

University of Washington Library,
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

[82] *Wash. House Journal,* 1891, p. 233.

NOTE. Two sessions of the state legislature have met since the foregoing paper was printed. At the session of 1911, the county of Pend Oreille was set off from Stevens. It occupies the extreme northeastern corner of the state. Its name is that of an Indian tribe so-called by the French because of their habit of wearing pendants in their ears, the phrase meaning, "hanging ear." At this session there were also four unsuccessful attempts at county making, the names proposed being: Cosgrove, Methow, White Salmon and Gray's Harbor.

At the session of 1913 the following names were proposed in various bills: Vashon, Bowen, White Salmon, Cook, Riverside, Cleveland, Simcoe, Methow, Standish, and Gray's Harbor. None of these bills were passed and the number of counties in the state remains at thirty-nine. C. W. S.

September 6, 1913.